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NAFEM SHOW '87: THE EQUIPMENT EMPOR

nafem/87
EXHIBITION & SEMINAR

R&I's Interior Design Awards honor year's best.....30
Classics + creativity = hot signature sandwiches.....186
Cover: Stage-door style for university dining.....44

SEPTEMBER 2, 1987

A Cahners publication serving the total foodservice industry

RESTAURANTS & INSTITUTIONS

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SEPT. 2, 1987

CONTENTS

Vol. 97 No. 19

BRIEFINGS
A summary for busy readers 4

COMMENTS
Jack Laughery is right 11
Operations in this issue 11

VIEWPOINT
Design explosion 14

R&I FORUM
Readers speak out 18

R&I REPORT
NAFEM '87 Preview 22
Regional Trends: Growth of high-tech industry 24
Tip Reporting: IRS finalizes tip regulations 25
Operator Outlook: Parental leave bill 26

R&I EXCLUSIVE
1987 Interior Design Awards 30

MENUS
Menu Concepts: Skooters' menu grows 90
Consumer's Choice: The popularity of egg rolls 91
Testings: What's new in Popeyes and Wendy's 96
Menu Promotions: McDonald's Monopoly 96

CHAIN DIGEST
Corporate Profile: Gilbert/Robinson strengthens after buyout 100
Convenience Stores: SuperAmerica expands 104
Adscope: Gorin's new owners launch new ad campaign 104
Prototypes: New growth for Old Spaghetti Warehouse Inc. 106
Expansion Strategies: Taco John's looks to double units 106

INDEPENDENTS
Ethnic Cuisine: Chinois East/West 130
Fund Raising: Chefs throw party in Beard's honor 132
Hotline: Independent happenings 138

INSTITUTIONS
Self-Operated Foodservice: Controlling quality from within 144

SYSTEMS
Human Resources: Teaching servers to say no 156
Maintenace & Sanitation: Keeping the restroom clean 160

FOOD
Lunch Entrees: Sandwiches 186
Food Facts: Enhancing fruit with black pepper 194

MARKETPLACE
Menu Merchandising: Labor-saving prepared salads 206
Products: Prepared salads products 208
Product Development: Prepared Mexican snacks 210
Buyers Mart: New products 212

CLASSIFIED ADS
Buying, selling, changing jobs 231

ET CETERA
People, Places & Promos 238
Celebrations: Birthdays, anniversaries . . . 239
Coming Up: September 16 issue 240
Personal Glimpse: Jacques Pepin 240
Previewing: A book review 240

ACTION EXPRESS
For more product information 244

ADVERTISING INDEX
Where to find ads in this issue 244

READER SERVICE CARD
For more information 245

Food Facilities & Energy News, a service of the American Gas Association, follows page 164.

■ OPERATOR OUTLOOK

Parental Leave Bill Excessive?

Operators convinced they can handle leaves of absence on their own.

"Cradle to grave protection is too much to expect from the business community."

"When a women has a choice of working or having a family, there shouldn't be a provision for leave."

"In 1987, I've spent 60% of my time dealing with bureaucracy and only 40% running the restaurant."

Those are a few of the extreme responses from independent operators who were asked what they thought of parental and medical leave legislation currently being considered in Congress.

Senate Bill 249 calls for employers to provide up to 18 weeks of parental leave during a two-year period for birth or adoption of a child, or the serious illness of a child or parent. It also mandates 26 weeks of medical leave yearly for employees' own serious health conditions. In both cases, the employer must provide continuing health benefits and guarantee the employee the same or equivalant job upon return.

Almost unanimously, operators are against passage of this bill and the National Restaurant Association is lobbying to defeat it. Proponents of the bill claim the changing demographics of the work force have been ignored, adversely affecting child and family care.

Operators say, however, they have been able to negotiate requests for leave on their own.

Carole Jean Goldberg of the Rib Cafe in Louisville, Ky., says she negotiates leave based on tenure. For management personnel with the company for three years, she offers six weeks leave for pregnancy, four of which are paid. For hourly employees, she offers normal paid vacation time and four weeks unpaid leave.

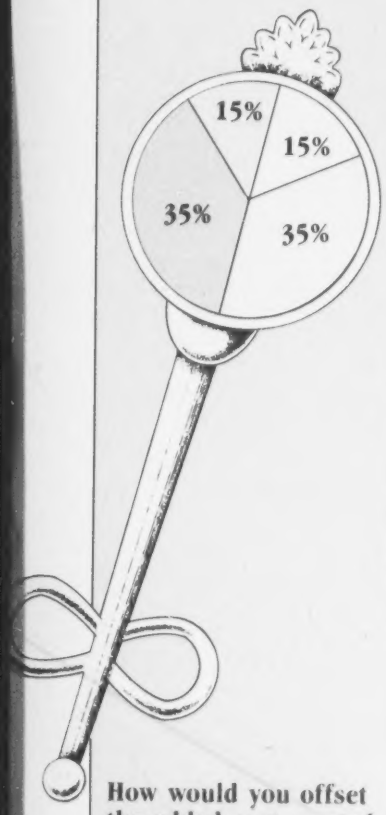
Rick Earl, manager of Oyster Bars of Sarasota Inc., says, "We always allow women the opportunity to come back after having a child. We give three weeks sick pay and three weeks paid vacation. About 50% will return under this plan."

Because the legislation allows employees to return to their job when ready, operators foresee a problem when it comes to management personnel. While waiters and waitresses are easier to absorb due to the constant turnover, hiring a manager as a temporary replacement is more complicated.

"It's hard for smaller operators to lose key employees and hire people who can't be kept," says Philip Deale of Philip's Supper House in Las Vegas, Nev. "It makes it hard to gain honesty, integrity and, especially, loyalty, because you're not giving any."

"In the long run," says one Atlanta restaurateur, "I'd make sure management jobs weren't held by women who could eventually cost me money, whereas in the past I took the best person."

—J.W.



How would you offset the added cost created by a mandatory leave bill?

- ☐ Reduce or freeze wages
- ☐ Reduce other benefits
- ☐ Reduce staff
- ☐ Do nothing

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Advertiser	Inquiry No.
ALCO Foodservice Equipment Co., Cleveland Range Co. (p.86-89)	24,25
American Gas Association (p.165-182)	190-242
American Gas/Commercial Foodservice (p.162-163)	45
American Gas/Garland (p.80-81)	21
American Gas/Vulcan Hart (p.164)	46
American Permanent Ware, Inc. (p.52)	12
American Wyott, Inc. (p.83)	22
Angelica Uniform Group (p.159)	43
Bakers Pride (p.105,107)	31,32
Beef Industry Council (p.69,71,73,75)	20
Best Foods, CPC Foodservice, Inc. (p.195-204)	
Blodgett, G.S. (p.241)	84
Blodgett Oven Co., Inc., The Rational Combi-Oven Steamer Div. (p.97)	28
Bloomfield Industries, Inc. (p.3)	1
Bread Effects Company (p.227)	67
Brooks & Sons, J.R. (p.220)	56
Bunge Edible Oil Corp. (p.209)	51
CPC Foodservice, Best Foods (p.195-204)	
CPC Foodservice, Hellmann's (p.195-204)	
Calavo Growers of California (p.60-61)	15
California Avocado Commission (p.192-193)	49
Cambro (p.46-49)	9,10
Capital City Prod. (p.152-C)	88
Carnation Co., Foodservice (p.190-191)	48
Chef Pierre (p.133,134-135)	35
Classified Advertising (p.231-237)	
Cleveland Range Co., Div. of ALCO Foodservice Equipment Co. (p.86-89)	24,25
Coldelite Corp. of America (p.229)	78
Commercial Aluminum Cookware Co. (p.153)	41
Cryovac Div., W.R. Grace & Co. (p.224)	61
The Drackett Products Co. (p.154-155)	42
DuPont Canada, Inc. (p.63)	17
Electric Eel Mfg. Co., Inc. (p.229)	74
FDI. Foods, Inc. (p.108-109)	33
Fishery Products, Inc. (p.213)	52
Florida Restaurant Association (p.216-E)	92
Garland Commercial Industries, Inc. (p.80-81)	21
General Wire Spring Co. (p.226)	68
Glenco Refrigeration Co. (p.62)	16
Gold Medal Products, Co. (p.228)	72
HMW Products (p.229)	75
Harkers, Inc. (p.216-A)	90
Heinz Co., H. J. (p.16-17)	6
Hellmann's, CPC Foodservice, Inc. (p.195-204)	
Hobart Corp. (p.IBC)	85
Hodges, Div. of Falcon Products (p.219)	55
Hunt-Wesson Foodservice Div. (p.7,8-9,10)	2
Iceland Seafood Corp. (p.56-57)	13
International Cold Storage Co., Inc. (p.220)	57
Katchall Industries, Inc. (p.227)	71
Keebler (p.223)	60
Knight Equipment Corp. (p.228)	77
Kold-Draft (p.221)	58
Lamb-Weston (p.98-99,148-149)	29,39
Lancaster Colony Commercial Products (p.225)	62
Lawry's Foods, Inc., Food Service Div. (p.142-143)	38
McGlaughlin Oil (p.228)	94
Market Forge Co. (p.162-103)	30

continued on page 242

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1987

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9/14/87

NAFEM SHOW '87: ALL NEW PRODUCT SHOW

T.J. Cinnamons and Ken Hill: on the rise...114

Design Awards: R&I's pick of the kitchens.....136
Debate: Is the industry serving healthier food?.....34
Cover: Great food demands the best equipment.....178

SEPTEMBER 16, 1987

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CONTENTS

Vol. 97 No. 20

BRIEFINGS
A summary for busy readers 4

COMMENTS
New trends in kitchen design 11
Operations in this issue 11

VIEWPOINT
Where does the Avon lady go? 14

R&I PEOPLE
Designing women 18

R&I REPORT
Finance: The cost of doing business 24
Taxes: New Florida tax 26
Economic Experts: Preschools' potential for foodservice growth 27
City Beat: Economic revitalization in Detroit 28

R&I EXCLUSIVE
R&I Roundtable: A discussion on marketing nutrition 34

MENUS
Menu Concepts: Mazzio's adds pasta 70
Menu Census: Green beans sell well 71
R&I Data: Food Cost Index 76
Food Price Update: Pork reached record high in '86 76

TASTE
Taste of England: English food on the American menu 82

CHAIN DIGEST
Chain Leader Q&A: Kenneth D. Hill 114
Executive Street: Three execs profiled 116
Success Story: Golden Greek Restaurants to expand 116
Convenience Stores: National Convenience Stores attract new customers 120
New Markets: Fast-food chains open in Nevada casinos 120

LIQUID ASSETS*
Back-Bar Design: Bar equipment to fit your style 120-C
Scotch Profile: Blended scotch never goes out of style 120-F
Products 120-H

INSTITUTIONS
Colleges & Universities: NACUFS meeting highlights 122
ADAF Cookbook: Appetizer recipes 127

KITCHEN DESIGN AWARDS
1987 Award Winners 136

FOOD
Entrees: Soup as main course 168
Healthline: Marriott's "California Lite" menu 174

NAFEM SHOW
Product Showcase 178

MARKETPLACE
Buyers Mart: New products 200

CLASSIFIED ADS
Buying, selling, changing jobs 218

ET CETERA
People, Places & Promos 226
Calendar: Upcoming events 227
Coming Up: Highlights from coming issues 228
Personal Glimpse: Tom G. Margittai 228
Previewing: A book review 228

ACTION EXPRESS
For more product information 232

ADVERTISING INDEX
Where to find ads in this issue 232

READER SERVICE CARD
For more information 233

*A special section for commercial operators only.

Real Dairy Discoveries, a service of American Dairy Association, follows page 96.

THE COST OF DOING BUSIN

Know how big your portions are and make sure menu prices are commensurate with those portion sizes.

■ FINANCE

Just as little cost increments can kill an operation, the savings generated from constant balance-sheet monitoring can save a business from going under.

With recent jumps in insurance and energy costs, it is no longer possible to take a simplistic view of costs, considering only food and labor. A tight lid must be kept on all costs.

There is a wide range of measures to keep food costs in line, which can shave a few points off the cost of doing business.

Adjusting the menu mix to reflect wholesale price fluctuations is one good way to manage costs. Thomas Morgan of Sterling Research Corp. in Arlington Heights, Ill., a specialist in analyzing and forecasting commodity supplies, demand and prices, recommends operators leave room on their menus for price increases for beef items in early 1988. Morgan says ribeye, loin, round and chuck cuts will approach record levels in the first six months of 1988 because of tighter cattle numbers.

Poultry prices have come down substantially and will go even lower into early 1988, and maybe into late next year, says Morgan. Turkey is cheaper as production has increased 20%. Pork prices have been high, but should be halved within a year and a half as production increases.

Food waste is listed by many cost experts as a big source of hidden costs. Sarah Villeneuve, senior consultant with Pannell Kerr Forster, says 85% to 90% of operators do not make full use of food.

"Tomato ends that could be used for stock are thrown out," says Villeneuve. "Lemon skins are wasted when they could be used to soak mops. Bread that ends up in the garbage could be used for croutons or bread pudding.

"If raising menu prices is a problem, go through the garbage and look at what is being wasted and who is responsible," she says. "A typical operation with 35% food costs is losing nearly $3 in revenue for every dollar of food thrown out."

Competitive bidding is another way to cut food costs and operators need to dismiss the myth that it only works for big-volume businesses, says Mark Eble, manager of the restaurant consulting group at Laventhol & Horwath.

"I have a deli account that does about $350,000 a year in sales," says Eble. "The owner has reduced food costs by 12%, half due to competitive bidding, half by reducing waste."

Eble added that the deli owner found his best deal through an active search rather than waiting for the right purveyor to knock on his door. He says the purveyors with low prices rely on big customers instead of sending out a large sales staff to pound the pavement. But these purveyors will be happy to deal with smaller independents, says Eble, especially if they are close by.

Eble also pointed to operators' lack of creativity and unnecessary use of costly products.

"My deli account was cooking with the fanciest corned beef he could find, thinking it would translate into better quality product for his customer," says Eble. "With a little work he found he could buy a lower cost product, prepare and trim it himself and save almost 30% on his per pound cost."

William Eaton, vice president with Cini-Little consulting firm in Potomac, Md., sees food costs jumping as operators increasingly elect to buy more non-site labor. Operators are trying to lower labor costs by buying more prepared foods. But Eaton says too many operators are pulling the labor

ESS

Operating costs are going to get worse before they get better, so keeping close tabs on every aspect of business can ensure your restaurant's survival.

from too few products. "You have to eliminate real labor hours by reducing a part-time employee's day by an hour or a full-time employee's week by a day," says Eaton.

Eaton also recommends reducing inventory accumulation. "Oversized storage areas are encouraging operators to overbuy," he says.

Also, many operations do not weigh products or check for quality, says industry consultant Malcolm Knapp. "It's incredible how much inferior product is wasted because the chef refuses to use it," he says. "Having firm, clear policies on receiving is a tremendous benefit to costs."

In many regions of the country, the cost of labor remains the biggest bugaboo. All the hidden costs that go with high turnover are significantly affecting the bottom line. The best savings tips in this area deal with motivation and retention practices, particularly with managers.

"Treat your managers as intelligent human beings and have them contribute to the nature of the environment rather than acting as caretakers," says Eble.

People will respond to challenge, but Eble warns, "Don't offer challenge unless they deserve it. Managers often have a guilt complex and offer better jobs just to make employees happy. That can be counterproductive."

Operators have become more sensitive about energy consumption since the big cost increases in the '70s. It is hard to find a restaurant without a double door today. Since the curve of rising energy costs has flattened, making a case for replacing an old equipment system with a modern, more efficient package is harder to do. But replacing equipment made at least 15 years ago can cut energy costs about 50%, says Eble. He says operators should examine these costs each year and learn to take a long-term view of energy costs and plan for obsolescence. Also, a fund should be set aside for replacement and repair. Eble recommends 2% to 3% of gross a year.

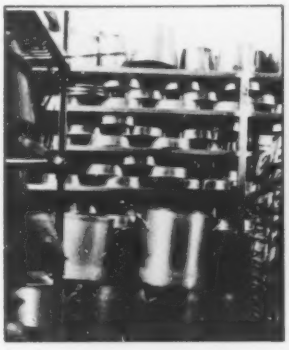
Knapp points out that most operators overuse their air conditioning systems. "If it's 90 degrees outside, you don't want it 68 degrees inside. It's too big a shock to the body," he says.

Energy maintenance is also important, says Knapp. Are your filters clean? And if windows are not properly caulked or insulated, it could cost 30% more to heat the structure, he says.

Whereas gas was in jeopardy 10 years ago, it is now holding its own and continues to capture its market better than electric utilities, according to Eaton.

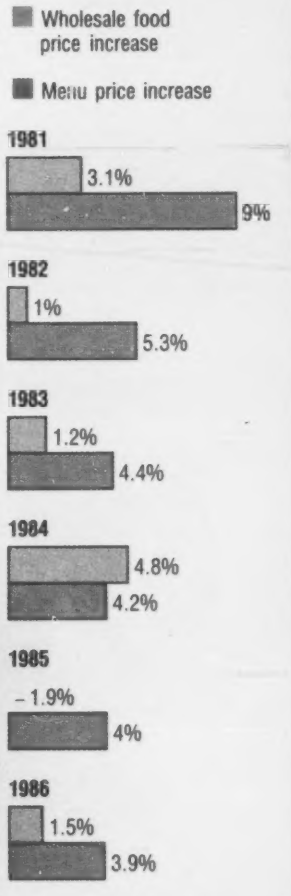
Of course everyone has been hit by rising insurance premiums, especially liquor liability. Even operators with good claim records have seen their prices double. Although the big increases appear to have subsided, the only compensation for high premiums is to keep a tight lid on everything else.

—Jeff Weinstein



A LITTLE RELIEF

Menu prices in the '80s have grown much more rapidly than wholesale food prices helping to offset the rapidly growing costs of labor and insurance.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

MENUS

■ R&I DATA

FOOD COST INDEX: COFFEE PRICES LOW, CHICKEN AND PEAS UP

Market-basket total for September is $105.71, up only 60 cents from August. Of 18 food commodity items, only a third showed any price decrease from a month ago. This is only the third time since April 1986 that the price of a pound of tomatoes has reached 60 cents. The cost of coffee, at $2.63 per pound, is at its lowest since slightly more than a year ago.

		% change	
	9/87	8/87	9/86
Hamburger (lb. 85% lean)	$1.27	2	5
Chicken (lb. cut for frying)	.96	23	10
N.Y. strip steak (lb./avg.)	3.84	7	4
Bread (Pullman loaf)	.78	0	1
Lettuce (iceberg/head)	.50	2	4
French fries (30 lb.)	11.32	−1	−4
Tomatoes (lb.)	.60	13	7
Milk (gal.)	1.85	−3	7
Eggs (doz.)	.65	2	3
Peaches (case/#10)	18.08	3	3
Peas (case/#10)	11.88	20	15
Frozen beans (30 lb.)	15.15	7	6
Ice cream (vanilla/gal.)	3.39	−5	−32
Butter (lb)	1.59	4	—
Cheddar cheese (lb.)	1.57	−1	—
Sugar (100 lb.)	27.96	−9	4
Coffee (lb.)	2.63	−12	−12
Breaded fish portions (lb.)	1.69	12	15

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■ FOOD PRICE UPDATE

Pork Prices Dip from Record High in 1986

Also, ice cream is tops with teens and buffalo cheese is on the horizon.

Retail pork prices for the first quarter of 1987 declined about 4% from record high levels in the fourth quarter of 1986, according to an article in *Pork Report*. The prices in January-March, however, were the highest on record for this period, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, up about 10% above the same period in 1986. Pork production was down less than 1%.

Also in the first quarter, poultry production was estimated to be up about 6%, and beef production was near year earlier levels.

Barring a severe drought, probabilities are high for cattle slaughter to be down 5% to 10% through the remainder of 1987 compared to 1986. Poultry production on the other hand, is expected to continue much above year-earlier levels unless feed prices rise unexpectedly.

In Other News . . . According to *The Food World of Teen-agers*, teen-agers 16 to 19 years old spend 60% more on food purchased away from home than they did five years ago. Teen-agers 13 to 15 years old spend 30% more.

A big share of the money goes for soft drinks and snacks. But the top 10 favorites include ice cream, homemade cookies, french fries, pizza, hamburgers and corn-on-the-cob. Teen-agers like doughnuts for breakfast, but list croissants and bagels as preferred breakfast foods, too. For lunch, they like hamburgers and chicken noodle soup. At dinner, pizza is the favorite, with steak running a close second.

. . . Fresh buffalo cheese may soon tickle the palates of the sophisticated. The first step, however, was the sale of fresh water buffalo meat in Rome, Ga.

And the next step will be milking buffalo herds to make genuine buffalo mozzarella. The herd producing meat and hoped-for milk was developed at Berry College, near Rome. Other herds at the University of Florida and Louisiana can produce soon.

—Kathleen Marshall

Pork prices reached record highs late in 1986, reflecting increased demand.

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Advertiser	Inquiry No.
A.F. Industries (p.212)	93
Alto-Shaam, Inc. (p.147-156)	125-131
Amana Refrigeration, Inc. (p.191)	78
American Dairy Association (p.97-112)	200-206
American Gas/Commercial Foodservice (p.166-167)	132
American Gas/Garland (p.80-81)	24
American Gas/Keating (p.157,185)	44,54
American Gas/Vulcan Hart (p.159)	45
American Permanent Ware, Inc. (p.188-A)	146
American Wyott, Inc. (p.188-B)	147
Anheuser-Busch, Inc. (p.121)	33
Atkins Technical, Inc. (p.210)	84
Atlantic Can Co. (p.209)	79
B.K. Industries (p.194)	141-145
Basic American Foods (p.60-61)	16
Belshaw Brothers (p.217)	115
Benhar-Angus Mills (p.214)	101
Blaze Products (p.216)	139
Blodgett, G.S. (p.188-F)	150
Combi-Oven Steamer Div. (p.188-C)	148
Bloomfield Industries, Inc. (p.145)	43
Blue Diamond Foodservice Div. (p.120-A)	1001
Blue Nun, Schieffelin & Co. (p.120-G)	1003
Borden Foodservice, Inc. (p.10)	4
Buffalo China, Inc. (p.229)	116
CM Corporation (p.188)	57
CPC Foodservice, Knorr (p.173)	51
Cambro (p.50-53)	13,14
Carnation Co., Foodservice (p.205)	73
Casio, Inc. (p.192)	63
Chef Pierre (p.96)	29
Chicago Mercantile Exchange (p.16)	7
Commercial Aluminum Cookware Co. (p.165)	49
Continental Coffee Products (p.IBC)	117
Cookshack, Inc. (p.210)	83
Crescent Metal Products, Inc. (p.163)	135-140
Crystal Tips/A Metal Masters Co. (p.184)	53
Diamond Crystal Specialty Foods, Inc. (p.131)	39
Dormont Mfg. Co. (p.211)	90
Eliason Corp. (p.196)	68
Florida Department of Citrus (p.113)	30
Fort Howard Paper (p.30-31)	10
Frymaster Corp. (p.188-K—188-L)	152
Garland Commercial Industries, Inc. (p.188-M—188-N)	153
Garland/American Gas (p.80-81)	24
General Foods Corp. (p.63-65)	17
Grindmaster Corporation (p.209)	81
HMW Products (p.215)	106
Hatco Corp. (p.141)	41
Haynes Mfg. (p.208)	77
Holman Group (p.216)	110
The Homer Laughlin China Company (p.189)	59
Hunt-Wesson Foodservice Div. (p.7,8-9)	3
Ice-O-Matic (p.188-O—188-P)	154
Intedge (p.190)	60
International Cold Storage Co., Inc. (p.192)	62
International Thermal Dispenser Co., Div. of Gettleman-Stoner, Inc. (p.212)	91
Kason Inds. (p.208)	76
Katchall Industries, Inc. (p.209)	82
Keating of Chicago, Inc., American Gas (p.157)	44
Keating, of Chicago, Inc. (p.213)	96
Kelvinator Commercial (p.210)	85
Kitchens of Sara Lee Foodservice Div. (p.86-89)	25,26
Knorr, CPC Foodservice (p.173)	51
Kold-Draft (p.193)	64

continued on page 230

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